

England's Economic Heartland – Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body

Consultation response, by Planning Oxfordshire's
Environment and Transport Sustainably (POETS)

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POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) is a small group of senior planning, environment and transport professionals and academics focussed primarily on planning and transport in Oxfordshire.

(For more information go to www.poetsplanningoxon.uk).

POETS wishes to object to the proposal to establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body for England's Economic Heartland (EEH) for the following reasons:

1. The phrasing of the EEH ambition - to "realise the *economic* potential of the region" – betrays the imbalance of its conception and vision. **If** there is a need for strategic regional planning across this region (and this has not yet been demonstrated), then there should be a democratically-elected and controlled regional planning body for this area. Such a remit would include the strategic spatial and land-use planning of the region, and not just the focus on economic or transport development. Only emphasising the economic objective, and transport as an element of that, risks a serious distortion of any regional planning objectives.
2. The proposal cites the putative Ox-Cam Arc as a further reason for creating a statutory sub-national transport body, but this only reinforces the need for any such bodies to have a proper democratic basis, especially as the status of Swindon and Hertfordshire (not in the purported "Arc") is not clear.
3. The EEH, despite its representation of a number of elected LAs, is still heavily committed by, and over-dependent on, the input of "the region's business leaders" (p.8): we are not convinced how democratic this leadership is, and believe it more appropriate that, if more input than elected LAs is needed, the membership should comprise elected representatives of residents, community, 3rd sector and business organisations.
4. The geographical incoherence of the area covered by EEH makes creation of a meaningful cohesive Transport Strategy impossible, thereby undermining one of the key functions of a Sub-national Transport Body.
5. The acquisition of transport powers concurrent with the existing statutory transport authorities, such as Oxfordshire County Council, is likely to create confusion, delay and increased procedural debate and bureaucracy, while also diluting accountability.